

An Introduction to and Remarks on the Comintern Resolution of 11 January 1934

By Marcus Alexander Templar

The resolution of 11 January 1934 of the Third International Worker's Association aka Communist International aka Comintern was a three-page statement on the situation on the ground in Macedonia as the representatives of the Bulgarian communist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (united) or IMRO (U) aka VMRO (U) had viewed it.

During the meeting of the Political Secretariat of the Balkan Regional Section on January 11, 1934, the Comintern established the resolution on "The Macedonian Question and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - United (IMRO-U)" under protocol № 207. The Balkan secretariat filed the resolution for its records under log № 815 only on 23 February 1934, i.e. two days before Dimitrov reached Moscow - on 25 February 1934. It is still mentioned as one of the most important documents for the creation of the Macedonian nation-state aka the Balkan Federation. The copy below is preserved in the archives of the Comintern.

Bohumir Šmeral, a Czech and Henryk Walecki (real name Maximilian Horwitz), a Pole were assigned to draft the original statement. Neither of them had any concept of the Macedonian issue (Branko Lazitsch 1986, 433-4; 502-3). In reality, Walecki assigned the draft of the resolution to a friend of his, another Pole, who also had "no concept of the Macedonian question" according to Dimitar Vlahov (I. B. S. 1994, 363).

One must pay attention to the meaning of specific words that often appear in the statement below. These words are "nation" and "people." What is a "nation" and what are the "people"? In Marxism, a nation and the people are not identical (Hadjinikolov et al., 1949, 39; Savova, 1982, 193) and this because a nation in a political sense is a nation-state.

Such an interpretation of the word "nation" appears in the book *"Marxism and the National Question,"* which states, "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed by a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." However, it continues, "It must be emphasized that none of the above characteristics taken separately be sufficient to define a nation. More than that, it is adequate for a single one of these characteristics to be lacking, and the nation ceases to be a nation" (Lenin 2002, 197; Stalin 1934, 8; Stalin 1975, 11). Lenin explained, "A nation is not a racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people" (Stalin 1934, 5; Stalin 1975, 8).

Thus if one takes away the territory from a nation, the latter ceases to be a nation anymore. After all, the territory does not define a nation in the ethnic sense. On the other hand, a nation in an ethnic sense does not need a common language to exist; it needs an identical language. A common language is used in nation-states, e.g. the United States, Canada, Australia, etc. Furthermore, the glossary of the Comintern describes a nation in an ethnic sense as a tribe.

Nonetheless, the most indicative of the term nation in the political sense lies within the resolution itself, which in one sentence it refers to Yugoslavia as a nation, which is not true. Yugoslavia was a nation-state not a nation in the ethnic sense. Thus when the resolution referred to the existence of the "Macedonian" nation" it meant the upcoming "Macedonian nation-state" which would include the "Macedonian people." The resolution was pushing ahead of time the recognition of the future formation of the Balkan Soviet Socialist Federation. It was the reason behind Tito – Dimitrov meeting at Bled, Slovenia and the cause of the civil war in Greece. Comintern had recognized the political necessity for the development of the Marxist ideology in its Leninist version.

In the administrative system of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ), Josip Broz aka Tito and Edvard Kardelj, both Marxists, avoided the use of the word "nations" to describe the various peoples of Yugoslavia. Instead, they called it *Narodi i Narodnosti*, which is mistranslated into English as "nations and nationalities." Although in Serbo-Croatian *narod* means, "people" (plural *narodi* for "peoples") the word *narodnost* goes a little bit further. "Narodnost" has its origin in Russia. It started as a doctrine or a political principle in the mid-1800s. Although originally it denoted merely literary conformity to Russia's distinct cultural heritage, it changed meaning by the radical Nikolay Dobrolyubov in his essay "What is Oblomovism" (1859 –60) and his articles published in the review *Современный* or *Contemporary* that transpired the Socialist realism of the early 1930s to the mid-1980s. In Marxist Yugoslavia, *narodnost* denoted a group of people sharing a national identity, but lacking attributes essential to "peoples" or *narodi*.

"People" is another word for which we should be careful. According to Stalin, "people are the working men of a given nation, i.e. working men of the same language, culture, [and] customs" (Djilas 1962, 157). Thus, the people can have the same or identical language, but a nation has to have a common language. Regarding the word "people" the following clarification is paramount, "In other documents of the Comintern, the expression "Macedonian people" (*makedonski narod*) also covers the non-Slavic populations inhabiting the region, i.e. Albanians, Turks, Greeks, Jews, Roma, etc". (Hristo Andonov-Poljanski 1981, v. 2, 181).

In this translation, I followed the meaning of the words "nation" and "people" as the Comintern had intended.

The other matter that one wants to pay attention to is the appointment of the governance of the Macedonian nation to be formed at the hands of the IMRO (U). According to resolution, it was the IMRO (U)'s responsibility to "educate" properly the Macedonian people and to administer the new state by the Leninist version of Marxism, and the communist economic system. The IMRO (U) would have full dominance over Macedonia's governance.

Self-determination applies solely to the political status of a specific region and peoples; it applies to nothing else. In respect of the means of achieving the self-determination of the Macedonian people, i.e. all inhabitants of Macedonia regardless of ethnic origin, it was proposed by Yugoslavia a referendum that would benefit the communist plan. A separate referendum would take place in each part of Macedonia,

i.e. Greek, Yugoslav, and Bulgarian, but the tally would be taken as if they were already united in. Given the fact that the Slavic populations of the Yugoslav and Bulgarian parts of Macedonia were numerically more populous than the Greek population and since the populations in both Slavic-speaking parts were under the control of one party dictatorships, the results of the referendum would be known even before people went to the polls.

The Comintern created and supported this resolution for propaganda's sake, which it directed to poorly educated members of the communist parties as it was characterized by a lack of elementary logic in its performance and distortion of historical facts.

The resolution's original editing leaves a lot to be desired with rather bad grammar, vague, imprecise and unclear use of language filled with runaway sentences. Whenever possible, I tried to correct some of the problems without changing the original meaning; I did keep the structure of the resolution regarding the consistency of the paragraphs. In general, although the intent of the resolution was to solve the Macedonian Question, in reality, it created new seeds for new problems adding one or more characteristics of the initial problems. It seems that the delegates of the Comintern did not know what they were approving.

Translated by Marcus A. Templar

**The Macedonian Question and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary
Organization - United (IMRO-U).**

Moscow, 11 January 1934

SECRET

I. Regarding the deterioration of the international and class conflicts, the imminent danger of new wars and the maturing of a revolutionary crisis, the Macedonian national revolutionary movement headed by the IMRO plays a role as an important revolutionary factor and ally of the working class, the peasantry and all oppressed ethnicities in the struggle to overthrow the dominion of the bourgeoisie and landlords of the three states that subjugate Macedonia (Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece).

The division of Macedonia, which was the basis of the agreement between Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece in their war against Turkey (1912), and the immediately controversial issue that led to a new war of Serbia, Greece, and others [Romania, Montenegro and Turkey] against Bulgaria (1913), the aggravation of the challenges and the struggle between these three states for domination over the entire Macedonia and the Aegean Sea, is a relentless goal in the post-war period.

On the other hand, the great imperialist governments turned Macedonia into a battleground during the world's imperialist war and are now using the Macedonian

question to strengthen their positions in the Balkans. Thus, Macedonia is one of the focal points of the impending imperialist war.

The countries that rule over Macedonia conduct an economic policy of robbery that ruins the working masses, [employ] fierce terror, and [apply] national oppression. The Macedonian peasants experience a shortage of land. The sizable land ownership, remnant of a large-scale feudalism is not banished. In the Yugoslav, Greek, and Bulgarian parts [of Macedonia], the so-called "ownerless lands" (remaining after the Turks left) in part were grabbed by the bourgeoisie and prosperous peasants and in part were used for settlements inconveniencing the villagers [who bought them] with heavy payments. These settlements in Yugoslavia and Greece were held exclusively for the benefit of Serbian and Greek elements. In the villages of Macedonia, Yugoslavia settled masses of Serbian soldiers, who represent the perpetrators of Serbian imperialism against the Macedonian peasantry.

A large number of Greek refugees from Turkey were settled in Greek Macedonia, and thousands of Macedonians were massacred in Bulgaria and Turkey. The ever-worsening agrarian crisis, the tax increase, the refusal of any financial assistance from the government led to the complete destruction and impoverishment of small and medium-size peasants and small craftsmen.

The dominant nation-states led by three imperialist governments, which divided Macedonia justify their national oppression by denying the ethnic peculiarities of the Macedonian people by rejecting the existence of the Macedonian nation-state. Greek chauvinism asserts that the indigenous Slavic population of its part of Macedonia that they have conquered consists of Hellenes who have been consecrated in the past centuries and must forcibly "return" to Greek culture, forbidding them to learn and speak their native language. The chauvinists of Greater Serbia, referring to the presence of Serbian impurities in the language of the local Macedonian population, declare this population as one of the "tribes" of the single Yugoslav nation-state and forcibly serve it. Finally, Bulgarian chauvinism, using the proximity of the Macedonian language to the Bulgarian one, declares them Bulgarian, and thus it justifies the occupation regime in the Petrich district of Macedonia and its plundering policy towards the entire Macedonia. Involving the struggle against the partition and enslavement of the Macedonian people against all kinds of national, cultural, social, and economic oppression, the IMRO is obliged to expose the true meaning of all deceiving arguments that denied the Macedonians the character of a nation-state and to prevent their penetration in its own setting.

The Bulgarian fascism, relying on the bourgeois and wealthy elements among Macedonians and Macedonian émigrés, uses the two wings of the fascist IMRO, led by Mihailov and Shandanov. The armed bands of IMRO were an assault squad in Tsankov's coup. All after the coup governments, including the present one, used and still use them to fight the working class of Bulgaria and against the working of the Macedonians. The "Mihailovists" enjoy special privileges, even the right to impose special taxes in the Petrich District. The Bulgarian fascists keep the slogan of the "Mihailovists" for the unification of the entire Macedonia from Bulgaria. The role of the

"Mihailovists" as overt agents of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie and Italian fascism has not changed, despite the fact that at the last Congress of the Macedonian [émigrés] fraternities (spring of 1933) had expressed themselves for the independence of Macedonia.

The escalation of dissatisfaction and the struggle of the masses, the divisions within the Bulgarian bourgeoisie led to the breakup of the fascist IMRO in 1928 and the creation of a second IMRO, headed by Shandanov (the so-called protogerovists) turned to Yugoslavia under the slogan of the slogan of a Yugoslav federation. This group, an agent of the bourgeoisie has found support among some Bulgarian bourgeois and government groups. To gain influence among the masses, they are using the growing dissatisfaction of Macedonian and Bulgarian workers with the "Mihailovists." By using "left" phraseology and terror against the "Mihailovists," they [Shandanovists] try to hold the masses from their transition toward an immense revolutionary struggle for national and economic liberation.

This particular situation of Macedonia, the national oppression and the exploitation of the broad working masses of the Macedonians by the nation-states that dominate Macedonia, the active participation in the struggle as well as the interests of the working masses, primarily the working class, makes the IMRO (U) to be the major revolutionary factor for liberation of the Macedonian workers. The struggle for a unified, independent Macedonian republic of the working people was the work of not only the Macedonian working masses but also the struggles of the working class and peasants under the leadership of the Communists in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Greece.

II. In its development and activities, the IMRO (U) has not fully utilized the possibilities for organizational exposure and political leadership of the national revolutionary movement and the struggle of the working people in Macedonia.

In Bulgaria, despite some progress, IMRO (U) is far behind in ideological influence and the growth of activities of the masses, working primarily among Macedonian émigrés without making adequate effort to consolidate in the Petrich District (the Macedonian part of Bulgaria). In the largest - and by territory and population, Serbian part of Macedonia, where the IMRO (U) organizations were once the strongest, there was not enough active and systemic work to restore organizations and the ties of leadership with them.

The set of circumstances is as follows: first of all, the Communists, not excluding the Bulgarian Communist Party, mainly in charge of the IMRO, who underestimated the importance and role of IMRO as a national revolutionary organization and failed to establish the necessary relations with it.

The Bulgarian Communist Party had insufficiently led IMRO (U) to turn it into a strong national revolutionary organization, insufficiently supporting perceptions, insufficiently guiding the fellowships in the IMRO (U) organizational echelons. The Yugoslav and Greek Communist Parties have long had no business with IMRO (U).

The party apparatus is obliged to dedicate the necessary number of Macedonian factions to the IMRO (U), to organize and manage the factions both in the centers and in the districts, without applying the methods of command and observing the rules of

conspiracy, to clarify to the parties the role of the IMRO and of the national revolutionary movement and to popularize the Macedonian national revolutionary struggle in the masses.

III. IMRO must become an organization of the masses of the working people of the entire Macedonia, leading them in the struggle for their national liberation and unification, against the Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek bourgeoisie that enslave them, [and against] the landlords and their fascist governments.

The IMRO is also compelled to organize and fight every day against all kinds of manifestations of national oppression, against any restrictive laws of the right to free speech in all countries and public institutions, the freedom of schools, of publications, i.e. in their native language. This struggle against national oppression must be closely related to the fight against the whole system of political terror, economic and social exploitation, against the heavy taxation, against settlements and expulsion of Macedonian peasants from their land, and in support of confiscation of land from landlords and governments and its distribution among the farmers. In this struggle, an essential slogan of the IMRO (U) must be an expression that respects the right to self-determination to form a nation-state along with the separation and fulfillment [of establishing] an independent united Macedonian republic of the working people.

The IMRO (U) is obliged to take a final struggle first and foremost in Bulgaria against the "Mihailovists," as accomplices in the enslavement of the Macedonian workers and apparent mercenaries of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, against their terror, organizing mass resistance and self-defense against them. Simultaneously, the IMRO is obliged to distinguish itself from the "Shandanovists" and to expose with concrete facts their treachery and their methods of struggle in the national movement.

The IMRO is obliged to introduce to the masses of working Macedonians that their only allies in the struggle for liberation are the working class, the peasantry, and the other oppressed ethnicities, that only the joint constant struggle with them will secure the national liberation and the unification of Macedonia.